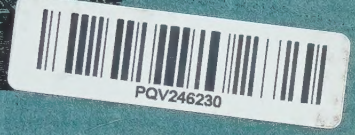
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# POINTS EAST

## NARRATIVES OF NEW ENGLAND

By RACHEL FIELD

BREWER AND WARREN INC.

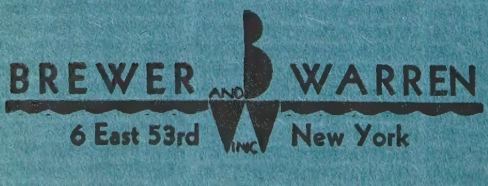
## POINTS EAST

### Narratives of New England

### By Rachel Field

Out of her long and sympathetic friendship with the natives and the legend-breathing islands of Maine, Rachel Field has written these moving poetic narratives. They bring alive the people and the country of the pointed firs as did the stories of Sarah Orne Jewett. They reach to the heart of New England, a mellowed, beauty-ridden heart that is only granite in its strength and its high resolves. This year of the Massachusetts Bay Tercentennial Celebration is a happy time for the publication of these legends, which capture with such sincerity and understanding a past that is felt through the thin crust of time in the New England of today.

$2.00



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# POINTS EAST

BY RACHEL FIELD

*The Pointed People*
*Taxis and Toadstools*
*Six Plays*
*The Patchwork Heart and other Plays*
*Hitty: Her First Hundred Years*

# POINTS EAST

## NARRATIVES

OF

## NEW ENGLAND

BY RACHEL FIELD

"The Past is such a Curious Creature"
EMILY DICKINSON

NEW YORK
BREWER AND WARREN INC.

1930

"This is the Place" by courtesy of Doubleday Doran Company from *Taxis and Toadstools.*

"The Old Pasture" by courtesy of *Books* of the Herald-Tribune.

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FOR

LUCY TALCOTT

*The illustrations in this book are taken from early American and English chap books. Several are by Thomas Bewick, the famous English engraver, and others of his school. The wood engravings appear again and again in 19th century broadsides and pamphlets, an indication that the blocks were handed down from printer to printer and borrowed liberally.*

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## *A NEW ENGLAND WINDOW*

Long, long ago through this same pane of glass
Eyes peered for Indians; saw trappers pass;
Watched trees fall back and houses multiply
Round that white steeple, saw the coach roll by,
And ships with lovely names skirt ledge and bar:—
*"Rainbow," "Sea-Garland," "Martha," "Morning Star,"*
Gold on their bows and canvas billowing
Whiter than any orchard in the Spring.
Out of this window even then, as now,
Green turned to scarlet on the maple bough,
And lives to legend,—brittle grown and dry
As leaves we snatch at when the wind blows by.

## *THE SHELL, THE COMB, AND THE BIRD*

I've seen a lot of tombstones in my time,
Portland to Eastport, but I never saw
The like of one I found Mount Desert way
In an old family burying plot, the kind
You come across so often on the islands
That lie to seaward,—where the spruces take
Most everything in time. They grew between
Those stones that were so dark and canted over
You couldn't read but half the words and dates.
The name was Jordan. I scraped moss enough
Away to make that out.
The odd one stood
Off in a corner by itself just like

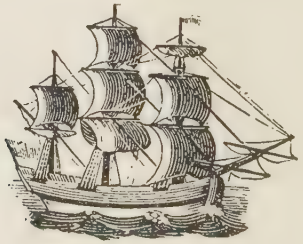
A poor relation. Come to find out later
That was the truth of it, and then some more.
Well, as I say, it stood there all alone.
Slate gray it was, worn pretty smooth and thin,
Without a letter or a date to mark it,—
Just those three sort of pictures in the stone
Cut so they showed out plain as anything:—
A shell curled round the edges, same's the kind
That Captains used to fetch back home from South
Sea voyages, and next a high-backed comb,
And underneath, real prominent and clear,
A bird-cage, pretty rough, of course, and still
That's what it was and no mistake. Why you
Could even trace the outlines of a bird
Behind the bars.
I tell you what, it turned
Me cold all over coming on it there
Although 'twas summer weather and a boat
Off Old Horse Ledges, hauling lobster traps,
And daisies in the grass and devils'-paint-brush
Like copper nail-heads shining in the sun,
And balsam needles spicing up the air
All round. I hurried back up to the village
A good bit faster than I'd come, and yet
I couldn't seem to put it from my mind.

You know how things like that will bother you.
I wasn't one to go and brood on tombstones.
I told myself folks buried there a hundred
And some odd years were no concern of mine.
I reasoned it all out real sensible
Until it got to be past eight o'clock,
And then I took my hat and got the flash light.
"Aunt Mattie Joy can tell me all about it,"
I said, " and what she doesn't know I'll get
"From Sarah Stanley or old Captain Black."

'Twas past eleven when I came away.
I lost the Captain's light below the hill,
Only my flash showed now and red and green
Ship lamps in harbor and Bear Island light.
I couldn't sleep for thinking what I'd heard.
Between the three of them I'd got enough
To keep me wide-eyed till the sun came up
And through my Eastern window, till the tips
Of nearby firs showed sharp against the red
As Indian arrow-heads. Then I could sleep
Knowing the truth more strange than any dream.
So here's the story then, the way I had it.

Bill Jordan was a widower, past thirty
The time he shipped as mate with Abner Joy,
Master, aboard the schooner *"Tropic Bird,"*
Full rigged and island built. She carried timber
To the West Indies, bringing spice and sugar,
Molasses, cotton, and Jamaica Rum
On her return trips. All her crew were picked
From nearby islands. Some had bought out shares.
Bill owned an eighth the vessel. He'd put all
He had beside his house and stores enough
To see his mother and the children through
Till he got back, in six months at the longest.
The roof was tight, the barn was full of hay,
The wood-shed stacked with seasoned logs and kindling.
He'd seen to that. Bill was a thorough man.
No hand at farming, but an able seaman,
Knew charts and coasts and currents most as well
As his own children's faces.
There were three
Young Jordans,—Hatty, Sam, and Little Martha,
A smart, but pindling child. They'd had a time
To raise her ever since her mother died
When she was two months old. Yes, Bill had known

Plenty of trouble for a man his age.
His Mother said 'twas lucky he had her
To keep his house and look out for his children
So's he could go to sea. She was a woman
Upward of sixty when he sailed, as strong
As any man,—more strict the neighbors said
Than any captain on the quarter-deck.
Those children toed the mark, and as for Bill,—
Some said he couldn't call his soul his own
At home, with Hatty gone. She'd been a sweet
And easy-going wife. Well, anyhow
His Mother took the ropes when he was gone
And no one can deny but what she managed
Better than most, considering what happend.
Bill had the children's picture done in tin-type
The week before he sailed in late September.
A travelling fellow stopped that way and took it.
Old Lady Jordan vowed it was a shame



To waste good money on a thing like that.
He'd see the children by another summer.
Well, that's how much they knew. The day he sailed
They watched the *"Tropic Bird"* head out to sea.

When she'd been out a year and not a word
Had come from any man aboard, some sent
Inquiring far as Portsmouth and to Boston.
But no one there could tell them anything.
One vessel's log reported sighting her
Off Hatteras, ten months back, and that was all.
Still they all hoped for news, the way folks will.
She might be laid up for repairs, they said,
Crippled from storms, or stranded on some coast
Where sailing vessels didn't touch at much.
They guessed all sorts of things, and island men
Did chores to help Old Lady Jordan out,—
Brought her as much as they could rightly spare
Out of their catches and their garden crops.
After two years they all gave up the notion
Of ever hearing news. The *"Tropic Bird"*
They held, was lost for sure with all aboard,
She'd gone the way that other ships had gone
Before her,—there was nothing they could do.

And then one night, three years most, to a day,
Round supper time, with folks all in their kitchens,
And darkness coming on, real chill and early,
Bill Jordan rowed ashore and beached a skiff
He'd borrowed over to the Port, and fetched
Himself and his queer cargo home again.
"Hi, there," he yelled to Sam and Hatty, "don't
"You know your Pa?" But they ran crying past him.
Old Lady Jordan came out to the door.
She held a glass lamp in one hand and called
Out sharp, "Who's there?"
"It's me, Ma, I've come back."
He said.
"It's Bill's voice right enough."
She peered
Into the dimness at the two vague shapes
Below her on the doorstep. Bill spoke up
More scared than hearty.
"Ma," he said, "I've fetched
"Strange cargo back with me from foreign parts."
His Mother's eyes grew sharp with swift suspicion.
"You've been read out for dead in Meetin', Bill,"
She said, "And it's no time for playing tricks.
"You tell me what you're hidin' there behind you."
"Well, here 'tis, Ma." He drew the strangest sort

Of figure out and stood her between them.
The lamp threw out a pool of light around her,—
A woman, but no bigger than a child,
A thing as brown and light as fallen leaves,
With eyes like narrow hollows of sea water,
And dark hair caught up by a jeweled comb
That gave out jets like fire. Her dress was red
As wood-bine in October. In one hand
She held a curly shell and in the other
A wicker bird-cage, with a bird inside.
"In God's name, Bill," Old Lady Jordan cried,
Setting the lamp down from her shaking hands,
"What do you call this thing you've fetched back
home?"
Bill spoke up quickly looking straight ahead,
"I call her wife, and that's the Gospel truth."
She didn't say a word for most a minute.
The Bird inside the cage grew fidgetty
And beat its wings and gave the queerest cry,
Clear as an icicle and sweet as honey.
Old Lady Jordan spoke up, harsh and sudden,
"God help us all then, Bill!" was what she said.

There were a lot of rumors after that.
They spread like wild-fire round to all the islands

The way such stories will. 'Twas years before
They got all sorted out to somewhere near
The truth of it, and even Bill himself
Didn't pretend to fathom more than half.
All he was sure of was the wreck and how
Enoch and Nat and Abner and the rest
Were drowned and scattered somewhere off that coast
That wasn't marked on any captain's chart,—
Where the steep cliffs were sheer and smooth as glass,
With a bright fringe of greenery on top,
And water-falls by dozens pouring over
In long, pale threads.
They'd known that they were off
Their course. They'd struck bad storms off Hatteras.
Then afterwards their compass wouldn't work,
And every night the stars kept showing up
In the wrong places. Not an easy feeling
To have the stars go back on you like that
With stores and water running low besides.
So any coast looked pretty good to them.
The boats were swinging, ready to put off,
When they drove on that ugly, hidden reef,
Without a sign of warning, not a point

Of rock showed out of water; not a line
Of breaker. Well, they took it fair and square.
The *"Tropic Bird"* snapped like a twig of birch
You'd break up for a fire. No time at all
And she was so much kindling wood.

Bill fell
Clear of the wreckage, knocked clean senseless
though.
He didn't know a thing till he came to
And found himself stretched by a little stream
Of water that came tumbling down the cliffs,—
And there she was, bent over him, and ladling
It up in her two hands, and on his face.

He was too spent at first to make things out.
Little by little though he figured how
He must have got clean off the bounds of time
And everything he'd ever rightly known.

It dazed him at the start, those crowding shapes
Little and brown like her, that seemed to blow
Past him like wind whichever way he looked.
They weren't of this earth, that was plain enough.
Though there were times they'd crowd around him
close
And then again there wouldn't be a one,
Only for her. If ever he put hand
To one or tried to speak, 'twould fade clean out
Before him same's a snowflake goes to nothing
If you breathe on it. He said that was how
It was, except for her. She was the only
Thing he could lay his hands on in that place
Beside the grass and stones. He'd have gone mad
Without her there to keep him company.
She had the quickest ways, more like a bird,
Or wave or shadow, than a thing that moved
By hand and foot, yet she was built according
To woman fashion, as he soon found out.
Yes, Bill was only human, and who'd blame him
For taking any comfort he could get
In such a place. She thought the world of him
He guessed she'd saved him by some kind of spell,
And she could read his thoughts, whether he'd say
A word or not. It made him wadgetty

At first before he got accustomed to it.
When he felt hungery she would fetch him food,—
Queer stuff on leaves that made his pulses tingle,
And drink that set him up to feel like God
Off on a holiday from heavenly duties.
He'd have forgot the Island fast enough
And everything back home but for the tin-type.
'Twas in his pocket, wrapped in tarpaulin,
So the salt water hadn't hurt it much.
His children's faces looked up at him plain
As when he'd had it done. He'd sit and stare
At it for hours in a kind of stupor,
Till every line and queer, familiar thing:—
The freckles on Sam's nose, and Hatty's hair
Parted above the pucker on her forehead,
So like his mother's that it made him smile,
And little Martha's curls and big, grave eyes,
The teeth that showed between her parted lips,
Gave him queer kind of pangs.
One day she saw
It in his hand and after that 'twas worse
With her than him. Seemed like those children went
Right to her head. You see, she'd never seen
Young ones before. The wonder is she didn't

Wear out that tin-type staring at it so.
Worshipped those three right from the first, she did,
And when she found out they were real and living
Nothing would do but she must go to them.
Yes, she prevailed on that queer troupe of hers
To let her go back home with him. He knew
What she was up to. He could tell they tried
To keep her from it. So she told him once,
He'd taught her how to speak by then and she
Was quick to learn.
Somehow it didn't seem
Strange to him then, to think of her back home,
Step-Mother to his children,—only when
He found himself upon familiar roads
(Though he could never say just how they reached
them.)
And saw her walking there, knee-high to nothing,
Beside him, with those three odd gifts she'd fetched
Away with her,—the shell, the comb, the Bird,—
The shock he felt was more than getting wrecked.
It knocked him gally-west, but there she was.
He couldn't send her back. Nothing to do
But to keep on and trust to Providence
They'd make out somehow. People looked at her

Uneasy and askance. That hurt his pride.
He'd always known respect from everyone,
And he was stubborn, too,—"Well, then, I'll show 'em,"
He told himself, "I mean that any wife
"Of mine shall have what's due her." Then he reddened
Remembering the truth.
At Prettymarsh
The Parson married them with Hatty's ring.
He'd worn it on his little finger since
The day she died.
Their names are in the book
The Parson kept, and you can see them yet
Set down in Bill's own hand. She couldn't write
But there's a mark she made against her name,
Jerusha Ann. Not that it suited her.
He hadn't thought about a name before
But these were two he'd seen once on a tombstone,
And they came back to him. He called her Rue
For short sometimes, but no one else beside him
Bothered to call her anything at all.

Towards evening of that day, they passed a woman
Rocking a baby by an open door.

First thing he knew the girl ran to the cradle
And snapped her fingers, in a way she had.
The child inside looked up and leered at her,
So wide the mother acted scared and kept
It pressed real close till they were out of sight.
That didn't make Bill feel much easier
As they pushed on together through the dusk.
Besides he'd learned the day, and month and year
When he wrote in the Parson's book,—'twas all
Of three since he'd set sail from home and yet
It seemed no longer than a month or so
To him. His head was like a hive of bees
Buzzing with fears and doubts he wouldn't name,
And so they came at last in sight of home.

"Raised in far ports, don't rightly know our ways."
So he made answer to his friends and neighbors.
But he could see they didn't half believe,
And he could never reconcile his mother.
He'd known she'd carry on, but not so much.
She had the energy to bear resentment,
Not just to let it grow into complaints
And petty naggings. Bill had never guessed

That any one could store up so much hatred.
"You could most cut the air in Jordan's kitchen."
The neighbors told each other, "it's that thick."
"Maybe she is a foreign jade-hopper,"
Some said, "but still I wouldn't like to be
"In her shoes now, or be the one to cross
"Old Lady Jordan, once her mind is set."
They all agreed on that, no matter how
They might denounce her heathen looks and ways.
'Twas scandalous to see the fuss she made
About those children, hardly natural,
And none of them her own! She couldn't keep
Her eyes and hands off them and that brought down
Showers of wrath upon her from Bill's Mother.
And so it went till Bill was near distracted.
He had a lot to worry him those days:—
Cold weather setting in and empty bins
Before him every time he went down cellar.
Crops had been poor and failing all that season,
So everyone was facing a lean winter.
Bill knew he didn't have a chance to raise
Funds for an interest in another vessel,
And now with frost upon them 'twas too late
To plant potatoes or a row of beans.

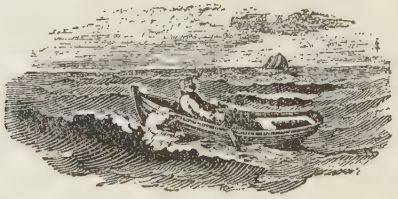
While he'd been gone and folks thought he was
drowned
They wouldn't see his family in want.
But now that he'd come back and with a wife,—
Well, that was his responsibility.
He hadn't any business getting married
The way things were. Of course if he had taken
Some healthy Widow Woman thereabouts,
There wouldn't one have said a word against it.
Even a wife from foreign parts with money,
They could have understood, but this one hadn't
Brought him a thing beside those three contraptions
She seemed to set such store by.
Yes, the news
Of Bill's Wife's dowery was all around
Before a week was out. The children told
About the shell and how she'd hold it close
Pressed to her ear and smile at what she heard,
And not know anything that went on round her.
She wore the comb caught high up in her hair
And even when she did the hardest house-work,—
Sweeping or washing clothes or scrubbing floors,
It always stayed in place, no matter what.
That made their Grandma act real cross, they said.
She claimed a kitchen wasn't any place

For finery and gim-cracks or for combs
With colored glass no decent folks would wear.
And then there was the Bird inside its cage.
All over green, it was, except the top-knot
And that was red as fire. She'd feed it one
Fir cone a day. It picked that clean, and then
Ruffled its feathers out and that was all.
It hadn't made a sound since that first night
She'd brought it, just stayed quiet in the cage
That she hung high above the kitchen window.
Their Grandma said she'd like to wring its neck
Only for fear of what their father'd do
If he found out.

Hatty and Sam took after
Old Lady Jordan, both in looks and ways,
Turned hostile eyes to all the shy advances
Their Step-Mother might make. But Martha, she
Was different, perhaps account of being
So delicate. She couldn't bear to see
A living thing in pain. Seemed like she knew
A lot of things that Other did, and if
Those two were ever left alone together
She'd give her back her kisses and sweet words,
Only Old Lady Jordan took good care
They didn't often get a chance for that.
I guess from what they say, the little girl

Was about all the comfort Bill's Wife got
For he was off sun-up to candle-light
Out in his dory, fishing for dear life.
The cod and haddock that he caught were all
They had to eat besides cornmeal and apples
From some old crooked trees behind the house.
And any fish above their needs Bill salted
Against mid-winter storms too wild to go
Outside the ledges in an open boat.
But fish were no more plentiful that Fall
Than garden crops. So nights he'd come back home
Sodden with water, stiff with hauling trawls,
Sullen, for worry made him so, till even
His Wife's quick ways and pretty looks could hardly
Rouse or distract him as they had before.

Old Lady Jordan made good use of these
Long absences of his to work the girl
Most to the bone, and no one by to see.



It was disgraceful all she put on her
And she no bigger than a child of ten.
She worried at her same's the sea will worry
Some wrecked boat or a jutting bit of rock,
And yet she couldn't seem to tire her
No matter if she gave her heavy work
Fit for a man, like lugging pails of water
In from the well, or chopping wood, or dragging
Stones up from shore to mend the pasture wall.
Seemed like that girl had some queer kind of power,
An everlasting energy that kept
Her fresh when other women would have dropped
Dead in the traces, yet the more she did,
The more Bill's Mother would contrive to tax her.
She never made complaint to Bill, though, till
They had that set-to over her own shell
She kept up on the kitchen shelf. She never
Would take it down excepting if there was
A lull in work, like waiting for the fire
To kindle, or a pot to come to boil,
Or after supper, and the dishes done.
But every time Old Lady Jordan saw
Her with it she'd fly in a fit of rage.
Well, one day little Martha begged to hold it
Close to her ear to hear it for herself.

She and her Step-Mother were all alone
There in the kitchen. She could never say
No to the child, and so she took it down,
And held it to her ear. The little girl
Grew still as anything, her eyes got big
And round as door-knobs, "My," she cried at last,
"It's full as it can be of people singing.
"I don't know what they say." And she began
To beat out time with both her feet, as if
She heard dance tunes and yet the room was quiet
Except the ticking clock and fire snapping.
They didn't either one hear steps outside
Or see Old Lady Jordan at the door.
Her face was dark with anger and she strode
Right in and took it from the child, and made
Out of the door again while Martha cried.
The Other jumped up quick and followed her
Soon as she saw, but then it was too late.
Bill's Mother threw the shell far out to sea.
The tide was high, the water green and deep
Under the steep cliffs just below the house.
It dropped as straight as lead and where it sank,
The water burned like fire for a moment
And something cried—it might have been the Bird,

Or then again the girl.
She would have thrown
Herself in after it, except for Bill.
He came up from the shore in time to catch her.
She struggled in his arms like something crazed.
He carried her indoors and put her down
On their own bed, and spread the patchwork quilt
That Hatty'd made, out over her and soothed
And spoke to her real gentle, like before
He'd married her. But afterwards Bill went
Out to his Mother and his face was set,—
"Listen to me, Ma,—once for all," he said,
"You keep your hands off her and her belongings.
"She's my true wife same's Hat was, if I lost her,—
"If she'd been drowned, and I thought you had done
it,
"I don't care if you are my flesh and bone,
"I tell you 'twould go pretty hard with you
"Or anyone that did her harm. I'd see
"To that myself and no mistake."
"That Hussy,"
Old Lady Jordan muttered, "I'll teach her
"To lord it over me in my son's house.
"Trying to turn his children from me too!"
But all the same she knew it wouldn't do

To get Bill roused like that. He'd keep his word
Once he'd laid down the law.

It wasn't long
After that day, before the Peddler came
On his last trip that Fall. He hailed from Bangor
And brought a sight of wares strung on his back.
He did good business with the island women.
Bill's Mother used to buy things of him often
In the old days, and though she shook her head
And swore she didn't even have the price
To buy a paper full of pins, he would
Open his pack before her on the door step.
The children gathered round, and Bill's brown wife
Looked from the wooden washtub where she bent
With soap-suds halfway up her arms and steam
Rising about her head. The strong noon sun
Made all his bright new pots and kettles shine,
And there were knives and scissors and warm shawls
Beside glass lamps and thimbles, thread and needles,
And strings of beads that caught the children's
fancy.
Old Lady Jordan sighed and pursed her lips.
"You might as well pack all your stuff right up,"
She told him, "We can't buy a thing this year.
"It's more'n we can contrive to live at all,

"What with Bill's savings lost and gone to bottom,
"And one more mouth to feed besides!"
At that she threw an ugly look behind her
To where her Son's Wife bent above her scrubbing.
The Peddler turned and then his sharp eyes brightened
With sudden cunning as he caught the glint
Of colored stones set in the high-backed comb.
"Now if the Lady over there was minded,"
He spoke persuasively, as was his custom,
"To let me have that comb she wears, I'd give
"More than it's worth in anything she fancies.
"The stones are only colored glass, and still
"It has a fancy pattern and my pack
"Would be so much the lighter for the trade.
"Come, M'am, you'd better clinch the bargain now."
The words were hardly off his tongue before
Old Lady Jordan answered up, real quick,
"I say it's riddence to bad rubbish, come
"Hand it right over to him, Girl."
She moved
As if to take it from her, and at that
The Girl's two hands all wet with suds and water
Flew to her hair. She darted through the woodshed
Fleet as a shadow.
"You come back, you Jade!"

Old Lady Jordan cried, but not so harsh
As if the Peddler hadn't been around.
"A fine wife you are to refuse to buy
"New pots and woolen for the children's clothes.
"Well, keep your trinket then and may it warm you
"The winter through!"
In vain the Peddler wheedled.
She only flitted farther from the house,
Until he took his pack and trudged away.
Bill's Mother took on something terrible
When he came home that night. She told him how
His wife had tricked and cheated them of all
Their rightful comforts.
"It's for this I've pinched
"And slaved to keep a roof above our heads.
"Next thing I know you'll let her turn me out."
Bill slumped down in a chair. Salt water oozed
From his old sea-boots and his hands were stiff
With tar and fish-scales.
"Can't you leave her be,"
He muttered, "and me too? It ain't so much
"For any man to ask in his own house.
"I wish to God that I was drowned along
"Of Nat and Rueben,—they've got peace I guess,
"More'n I have here between the two of you."

His Mother didn't say much more to him
But after that she wouldn't lift a finger
To help with all the housework. She just sat
And rocked and made complaint to passersby.
Sometimes she'd go about from house to house
Telling the neighbors all she had to bear.
"It's her house, let her look out for it then,"
She'd say, "For she's a bitter pill without
"Breaking my back besides."
But still that Girl
Could do the work of ten in half the time.
There never was her beat on any island
For putting hard work through. Folks had to say
Whatever else she was, she wasn't lazy.
No, nor neglectful of Bill's children either.
She even might have won them round in time,
But for what happened at Kate Martin's funeral.

There's not a soul left living now who saw it
With his own eyes, but Sarah Stanley's mother

Was there and sitting right nearby. I got
It pretty straight, you see, and there was some
Aunt Mattie Joy remembered to have heard
Back in her youth.
When folks took sick and died
Out on the islands in those days, it meant
A lot beside just mouring the departed.
Women must do the laying out and men
Must drop their work to help in coffin making,
Or digging graves, and if they couldn't fetch
A Parson over from across the Bay
They'd make out reading texts and singing hymns
The best they could.
Well, when Kate Martin died,
Long about late November, Bill he did
His share with other men. Kate was a fine
And hearty woman, only just turned forty.
Well thought and spoken of by everyone
So it was fitting they should all turn out
To pay her their respects for the last time.
Bill and his Mother put their best things on
And he brought out a dress and hood of Hatty's.
"For Rue can't go rigged out in red," he said.
He must have thought there'd be a lot of talk
If she stayed home. It never crossed his mind

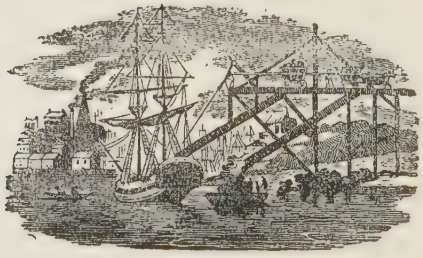
I guess, but what she didn't know as well
As anyone what they were going to.
He couldn't have, or else he would have told her
What all the fuss was for and why the folks
They passed along the road all looked so solemn,
With such long faces and grave shakes of head.
She didn't want to go inside the house
When they got to the door with its black bow
Of crepe. She seemed to scent some trouble same's
A dog or cat will, and she clung to Bill.
He'd meant to keep her by him all along
Only the house was crowded so with people
He had to stay outside with other men.
Two women fetched her in to sit with them.
She acted kind of scared and kept her eyes
Cast down right through it, when they all got up
To take a last look at Kate Martin's face
The women dragged her up between them though
She hung back some. It was the custom then
To file past one by one. Well, when she came
Up close enough to see inside, she gave
The most unearthly screech you ever heard.
It froze folks clear down to the bone,—so shrill
It was enough to rouse Kate Martin up
From her own shroud. But no one did a thing

To stop her. They all acted plain amazed.
She'd only had one look, but 'twas enough
For her,—she stood and shook from head to foot,
Then turned and made out through the open door.
They all went scattering right and left before her.
Bill tried to catch her, but he might as well
Have tried to keep a wind from blowing by.
Too scared she must have been to think of him
By that time,—all she cared about it seemed
Was just to feel she wasn't lying stretched
There cold and stiff in a pine box like Kate.
Yes, out she ran and past them like a streak,
Waving her arms and making little noises,
Those frightened cheeps that mice or rabbits make
When they're run down at last and no way out.
She made off for a half cleared field nearby
Above the sea and leaped from rock and hillock
Like nothing human. Once they heard her laugh.
That dress of Hatty's and the long hood strings
Whipped round her every which-way as she danced.
She kept it up till she dropped down at last
Among the juniper and milk-weed stalks.
Bill had to pick her up and carry her
She was so spent with her outlandish antics.

Folks were too scandalized to question him

About it much, but they had their opinions,
And none too favorable. Though Bill gave out
She'd never looked on a dead face before,
So that the shock had made her crazed with grief.
"Then it's no decent grief," they told each other,
"In our grandmother's day they would have burned
her,
"Or hung her for a witch. How do we know
"She isn't one in spite of what Bill says?
"For all her carrying on there at the funeral
"She never shed a tear. It's often said
"As how THEY can't,—it's always a sure sign."
And so they came to shun her more and more
As time went on,—to hurry past the house,
And pull their children close as they went by
If she were hanging wash out in the yard.
Bill didn't say much, still, he wasn't blind
Or deaf. His mouth got more set every day.
He didn't speak up hearty as he had.
She must have known what went on in his mind.
She'd always kept that knack she had of knowing.
It was beyond her powers now to cheer
Or please him much, and so when he had word
They needed men for building ships at Bath,
He got what things he could command together

And made his plans to leave.
"It's better so,"
He told his Wife the night before, "one less
"To feed, and then by March or April surely
"I will have earned enough to see us through
"Till I can ship aboard another vessel."
She wanted he should take her with him there.
But he said no,—a ship-yard was no place
For women, and beside there might not be
Work when he got there. She must stay behind
To watch out for the children, keep the house,
And make supplies go far as any could.
He saw the look of fear come in her eyes
And guessed the reason, "Don't take on," he said,
"She won't do you no harm, I'll see to that."
He kept his word too,—"
"Ma," he told her plain,
"If you lay hands on Rue, or give her more
"Of your tongue lashings while I'm gone away,
"If you do and it comes back to my ears,—
"I wouldn't answer for what I might do."



They talk about that winter yet in Maine.
And how such storms and cold have never been
Before or since. There in the islands ice
Was heaped right up in piles around the wharves.
The Bay and Channel both froze over solid
So teams could cross clear over to the mainland,
And ports and harbors were a sight to see
Cluttered with every sort of ice-jammed rig.
That was in February, and if stores
Were running short round Christmas, they were all
But gone by then, and even prosperous folks
Were pretty hard pressed getting food enough
For all their needs. Eggs were as scarce as gold.
There wasn't any flour, meat or sugar.
Down in the Jordan house out on the point
They ate the dried fish first, then lived on meal
Stirred into mush; brewed tea from checker-berries
Stiff frozen in the ice.

Old Lady Jordan
Sat in her corner, grim as any fog-bank
On the horizon, waiting to make trouble.
She didn't dare to lay hands on Bill's Wife
After the things he'd said, but she made up
A lot with that sharp tongue of her's,—'twas scold
And scold again from early morn till night.

One day there wasn't so much as a spoonful
Of meal left in the barrel. Hatty cried
And Sam declared he couldn't go to school
With nothing in his stomach, even Martha
Began to shred a cone to try and eat it
Same as the Bird did. When she saw the child
Do that, Bill's Wife looked nearest that she came
To crying, but she never said a word.
Round noon they missed her from the house and
shed.
Old Lady Jordan acted real put out.
"I ain't surprised," she said to Sam and Hatty,
"Just let hard times come and some folks'll make
"Off quick's their feet can carry them away.
"Of course she couldn't go while there was any
"Food to be had. Oh, well, I know her kind."
Which wasn't hardly fair, seeing she'd scarcely
Taken a mouthful for herself those days.
"Maybe she won't come back at all," Sam said,
And Hatty folded up her lips the way
Her Grandma always did. But little Martha
She looked up from the hearthstone where she sat,
"She wouldn't leave her bird behind." She pointed
To where the cage hung, and the Bird inside
Began to beat its wings and act afraid

With her not by.

"Plague take the ugly critter,"
Old Lady Jordan snapped, "I'd wring its neck
"And put it in the pot to stew this minute
"If I thought any meat was on its bones!"

'Twas long past dark when she came back, bent double
Under the load of things she carried with her.
She looked most fit to drop, but then, no wonder
She must have brought full sixty pounds or more
Of goods. Both arms were full and some lashed on
Her back behind. She looked more like a witch
Than ever with that hump beneath her cloak.
She had Sam's sled and that was loaded, too.
Her hands were stuck fast to the ropes until
She thawed them out awhile before the fire.
Well, God in heaven alone knows how she did it!
It turned out later she'd been clear across
The Bay and back, on foot, on that rough ice.
Cold as she was and spent, she couldn't wait
To open up those bags and shows them all
She'd fetched back from the Port,—white flour and tea,
A sack of winter vegetables and corn

Enough to last till Spring, and more salt fish,
A loaf of sugar; butter in a firkin,
And dear knows what beside that could be had
Over to Kimball's store or Preble's Tavern.
The children stood and stared with open mouths.
At first they'd touch the things real kind of timid,
As if they thought they'd vanish any time.
But when she took the bolt of woolen cloth
Off of her back and spread it out,—those three
Began to skip and clap their hands and laugh
The way they hadn't since the cold set in.
'Twas thick, fine cashmere stuff, yard upon yard,
And most as bright a red as her own dress
Had been before it grew so soiled and faded
With heavy work. Old Lady Jordan sniffed
Suspiciously and felt it with her fingers.
"It feels all wool," she finally admitted,
"But why you couldn't choose a decent color,
"Like blue or brown, is more than I can see.
"You'd better tell me quick what sort of mischief
"You've been contriving at to buy such things?
"I wouldn't wonder if you took them all
"Without a penny. Maybe Sheriff Somes
"Will be here after them first thing tomorrow
"And cart you off besides to Eden Jail."

The girl's teeth still were chattering with cold
So hard she couldn't speak much, but she made
Quick signs to show that she'd come rightly by
them.
Old Lady Jordan still looked pretty doubting,
Only 'twas then that Martha stopped off short
Right in the middle of a skip and pointed
To where the hood had fallen back and showed
Her Step-Mother's dark head and loosened hair.
"Oh, my," she cried out, "see, you've gone and lost
"Your pretty comb,—the one the Peddler wanted!"

From that day on it seemed, she kind of dwindled,
You couldn't say just how,—not lack of food
Or any harder work than she'd put through
For months before. 'Twas like she shrank, the way
A tallow candle will that burns itself.
It must have been that comb had some queer power
All of its own, so nothing tired her
Long as she wore it. No one knows, of course,
But anyhow she never was the same
After she parted with it. Captain Black
Told me he heard it turned up Portland way
Years later, and the stones were real enough.
I guess the spell could only work with her,

It went for old junk long ago most likely.
She acted sort of low, but never made
Complaint, though every day it got more hard
For her to scrub and scour and lug up pails.
By March you might have thought her someone's
scarecrow
Kept indoors by mistake. Her bones stuck out
And when her skirts whipped round her in the wind
She'd cant way over same's a ship at sea
When canvas fills and flaps. Her skin was browner
And shriveled. Yes, they said, you half expected
To see her blow away like last years leaves,
Or hear her fingers rattle like dry seed-pods.
They looked for Bill's return then any day,
But still he didn't come.
"He's been delayed
"With April freshets now the ice is melting,"
His Mother grumbled, "like enough he's drowned
"Fording some stream, if he ain't dead already
"And buried thanks to you!"
"We'd all be starved
"And dead ourselves except for her," said Martha.
She dared to side against her Grandmother
As time went on and even tried to help
About the housework, doing small odd jobs.

Sometimes those two would have long talks together
When no one else was by to overhear.
Seemed 'twas some kind of secret that they shared
Between the two of them. Once Martha tried
To tell her father how it was, months after,
But even then she couldn't half explain,—
She only knew that she must feed the Bird
And guard it carefully from any harm,
So Martha promised, and she kept her word.
But that was after Bill came back.
He turned
In at the door one day and found his wife
Lugging a pail of water fit to break her
Up from the well. He strode right to her quick
And took it out of her two hands, she dropped
All of a-heap before him there with joy
And plum exhaustion. First he set the pail
Indoors and then he came and fetched her in.
She didn't weigh so much as little Martha
By then. He looked real shocked and scared to see
How changed she was.
"Why Rue," he said, "whatever
"Under the canopy's come over you? You ain't
"No bigger than a cricket now. You're sick
"And no mistake. I'll get the Doctor over

"From Ellsworth, if you say the word."
She shook
Her head and begged he wouldn't go and leave her
So soon again. She clung so tight to him
That he gave in and let her have her way.

Bill's Mother stirred herself some round the place
Once he was back, which helped a little, still
The Girl went on down hill.
"Once it gets warm,"
He told her, "You'll be your old self again."
But when it got past May and apple trees
Turned white again and not a lilac bush
But showed a spike or two of purple bloom
She'd got so weak she had to stop and rest
Between the chores she tried to keep on doing.
Bill rigged a kind of wooden settle for her
Under the window, just below the bird-cage,
So she could drop down any time she wanted
And see him as he worked down by the shore,
Mending his traps and trawls, or if he fished
Out past the ledges. He had dug a garden
And paid for seed and tools from what he'd saved
That winter,—'twasn't much, but still he guessed
With summer coming they'd make out till crops

Were in, and there was talk about a berth
A Bristol Captain might have later on.
It seemed things couldn't be so bad again
As they had been,—except his Mother's tongue
And that was sharp as ever.

Neighbors stopped
To gossip on the doorstep as they passed
Once in awhile, for summer weather thawed
And limbered up their feelings. "After all,
"She don't act wild the way she did," they said.
"I guess this winter put the fear of God
"Inside her once for all. It wouldn't do
"To treat her same's the rest of us or make
"Her feel too much at home, for likely she
"Would be the sort to make herself too free
"And easy in our kitchens,—still we might
"Give her good-morning when we're going by."

So it was June again, before they knew it
Daisies and buttercups and devil's-paint-brush
Were going it full tilt in every field,
Fit to put out your eyes with brightness same
As they do now, only she didn't seem

To take much comfort in them. By that time
She was most shrunk to nothing and she lay
Real quiet in her place there by the window.
She'd shake her head if Bill asked did she feel
Pain anywhere. She couldn't understand
Just what he meant by such a word and yet
'Twas plain enough that she was losing ground,
And all the remedies Bill bought or borrowed
Were no more help than blowing on a fire
Failing for lack of fuel. So Bill took
What little he had left, to fetch the doctor
Over from Ellsworth, though his Mother frowned
And fumed at such a waste of time and money.
"I aim to save Rue if I can," he said,
"God knows I've had my share of trouble, Ma,
"Without I have regrets as well to carry
"Long as I live,—whatever folks may say
"It won't be that I spared myself or grudged
"Her anything I had. Get Lizzie Morse
"Or anyone you can to help you out
"Till I come back."

"You take it easy, Rue,"
He told his wife, "I'll fetch old Doctor Stone.
"He keeps a cure for nearly everything

"Inside that case of his. He'll have you up
"And round again in no time,—smart's a whip."

When he was pulling off shore in his dory
She had to give her handkerchief to Martha
And get the child to wave it from the window,
So he would think 'twas her. She hadn't strength
Enough to raise up on her elbow then
Much less do that.
She'd asked to have the Bird
Set down beside her on the window ledge
Where she could feed it, but Bill's Mother said
It dirtied up the floor and every time
She found it down she'd hang it up again
Well out of reach. She couldn't stand to see
That Girl take comfort out of anything.
Maybe she guessed, too, there was something queer
About that Bird that she should want it by.
But anyhow she did her best to thwart her.

'Twas bound to be three days 'till Bill got back

And longer if he found the Doctor off
Up country somewhere so he'd have to wait.
She seemed to fail more from the time his boat
Put out of sight.
Old Lady Jordan sighed
"Disgrace enough it was to have you well,"
She fumed, "without you taking sick like this
"To clutter up the kitchen all day long,
"While my old back can break with waiting on you,
"And Bill spend what he's saved on wild goose chases
"That take him dear knows where, just when he'd ought
"To fish and plant his garden. Well, I might
"Have known right from start how it would end."

By the third day that Bill was gone, his Wife
Was taken worse than any time before,
With chills and sinking spells and she began
To act real terror stricken like a sick
Wood creature when it knows it can't hold out
Much longer. Those great eyes of her's grew dark
With fright, except a little rim of green
That showed all round the edges, and she said
A lot of things that no one could make out

Not even little Martha, who was quick
To catch her meanings, only it was plain
Her mind was running on Kate Martin's funeral,
For she'd cry out her name and wake from sleep
To feel if she could move her hands and feet,—
"Not cold and stiff,—not yet," she'd say and cower
Like something terrible was after her,
And only she could see it coming on.
"Uneasy conscience, that's what ails her now,"
Old Lady Jordan said, and shook her head.
"Folks that have led good Christian lives don't act
"In no such way,—it's only bad ones make
"A fuss like that and are afraid to die."
But at that word the girl began to shake
And hold both hands before her great scared eyes.
"No, no," she kind of moaned between her fingers,
"Don't let them bring the box and put me in."
And she'd keep lifting up her eyes to where
The Bird-Cage hung,—seemed like 'twas all she had
To give her any kind of comfort then.
And so it went till towards late afternoon
When she was left with only Martha by
To watch her, for it was wild strawberry time
And Sam and Hatty picking in the pasture.
Old Lady Jordan was out borrowing herbs

And telling neighbors more about her trials.
She hadn't any call to go and leave her
Like that, and Bill reproached her afterward.
For Martha after all was barely six,
Too young to know of dying and the like.
All they could get the child to tell about it
Later,—was how at first the Bird began
To worry in its cage and beat its wings
Against the bars and act real terrified
Just like a thunderstorm was in the air,
Although the afternoon was warm and pleasant.
Then how her Step-Mother awoke and tried
To reach her arms out to the Bird, but how
She couldn't raise her finger's more'n an inch
Or two before she fell back limp again.
She hadn't hardly strength to draw a breath.
The child had never seen her taken so.
She'd get her lips apart, but still no sound
Would come between.
"I knew she wanted something,
"She wanted it real bad," so Martha told them,
Her father and the others afterwards,
"She couldn't say a word to tell me what
"Only I knew the way she looked at me
"I'd got to do it quick,—and I was scared."

Somehow at last she made out 'twas the Bird
She hankered after so. It beat its wings
And struggled,—but the cage was hung up high,
Well out of Martha's reach to fetch it down,
Although she climbed up on the window-ledge
And reached on tip-toe for it, with both arms.
Old Lady Jordan she'd made sure of that,
And every breath it seemed that Girl could draw
Would surely be her last.
"I knew I'd got
"To get it for her someway," Martha said,
"Yes, I could feel her eyes clear through my dress
"Behind, and it was queer. I got the poker
"And pried it off the hook, that's how I done it."

There's no one knows, I guess, what really happened
Right after that. Only those two were there
Together in the kitchen with the clock
The only sound except the wind and water
Real soft and fitful just outside.
The tide was pretty near run out by then
And sunset coming on between the spruces.
Bill's wife she lay without a sign of life,
Only her eyes. She had to make them do
For speech and gesturing. She got the child

To put the cage down on the sill beside
The open window. Martha knew she wanted
That she should set the Bird free than and there.
And so she fumbled at the little catch,
But 'twas contrived in some odd foreign fashion
And Martha's hands too delicate to force it.
She struggled with numb fingers. All the time
She didn't dare to face the other's eyes
On her so scared and pleading, and the Bird
Was drooping now, with all its feathers limp.
Its eyes were getting misted over, too,
And glazed-like. Still the Child kept at her prying
But what she did to make it give at last
She never could explain to anyone.
The wicker door turned back upon its hinges
Without a sound and though the Bird had seemed
Most dead inside it,—suddenly it gave
A little kind of shiver and its eyes
Got bright and shiny looking in a minute,
And then it went and gave that cry again,
The same as on the night Bill fetched them home.
A neighbor heard it passing on the road,
It set her running home with beating heart,
And old 'Lige Gilley fishing off the point
Heard it and swore he watched a strange bird fly

Past him,—beyond the farthest gulls and out
To open sea, right up against the sun.
Whether he did or not,—'twas gone inside
The twinkling of an eye. When Martha turned
Back to her Step-Mother, the bed was empty,
With nothing but a heap of crumpled clothes,—
The old red dress, so faded now and patched,
A shawl of Hatty's and her worn-out shoes,
And where she'd lain so long, her very shape
Showed lightly dented, like the print a wave
Will leave behind it on some sandy beach.
Yes, that was all, except the wedding ring
Bill had put on her finger ten months back.
It lay on top, caught in a fold of cloth,
But whether she had put it there on purpose,
Or if her finger'd grown too thin to hold it
Nobody knows, not even Bill himself.

Next day Bill went to Somesville for a stone.
It took the last cent that he had to buy it.
He fetched it back alone and all that night
He worked down in his fish-shed by the shore.
Bill always had been skillful with a chisel
And quite a hand at carving in his youth.
Long before sunrise he took pick and shovel

Up to that burying plot between their house
And an old road that used to run nearby.
The neighbors heard the sound of stone and iron
While they were still abed,—and later on
He came to every door himself and asked
Real quiet and respectful, if they'd come
That afternoon up to his family lot.
He said whatever things they might have thought,
Or grudges that they had against his wife,
He'd take it kindly if they'd put them by
And help him mourn her loss the same as if
She had been Island born and raised like them.
Some wouldn't stir a step and made remarks,
But there were others who put on their best
And went. 'Twas curiosity, I guess,
With most, but still they went the way he'd asked.
Aunt Mattie says her mother could remember
How she went, too, along with island women.
She wasn't more than fourteen at the time.
She said Bill had the grave all dug and ready,—
A shallow one off by the corner there
Because Old Lady Jordan wouldn't have
It near the rest of them.
He'd set the stone
Up straight above it, they could see real clear

And plain, what he had cut there with his chisel:—
The Shell, the Comb, the Bird inside its cage
As true as life. Folks looked at one another
But no one dared to raise a word Bill looked
So grim and set about the mouth and eyes.
He had her things all in a pile together,
Folded real neat,—the wedding ring, and cage
Were there too, and a cup she'd always fancied
With pictures on it. One by one he laid them
Inside the hole, and shoveled earth on top,
While everyone looked on and wondered what
They'd ought to do about such going's on.
When that was done he beckoned little Martha
Who stood nearby with flowers in her hand.
He set them on the grave and stood his shovel
Against the new slate stone.
"Well, Friends," he said.
"There's things beyond explaining. She was one.
"And now she's gone,—that's all I've got to say,
"Except, I've reared this stone in grief and mourning,
"And anyone that tries to tamper with it
"Will have a lot to answer for from me,
"And now I'd take it kindly if you'd raise
"A hymn tune here before you go away."

They did, though no one living now joined in,
And no one recollects what tune it was.
Bill went to sea again with some success,
And though he never took another wife
He lived to see two of his children marry
And bring up families. He buried Martha
When she was seventeen, and then his Mother.
Bill followed her soon after and folks wondered
Which of his women they should lay him by.
I guess they thought Old Lady Jordan wouldn't
Rest easy with him anywhere but next
To her and Hatty, so that's where they put him.
For after all as everybody knows
There's nothing buried underneath that other
Though it's the finest tombstone hereabouts.

## *EPITAPH*

Hardly a brick
Or stone to show
That a house once stood,—
But lilies grow
Matted and yellow,
And here between
Fern and juniper's
Thickset green
A cinnamon rose
And a buzzing bee
Are keeping a garden's
Memory.

## *DELPHINIUM*

"I can't abide to see delphinium,
"In bloom." I heard Seth Rowe remark one time.
Seemed pretty queer to me and Seth a Captain
Who'd shipped as far as any in his day,
And got big prices sailing summer people
Round in his sloop. He lived all by himself
In an old boathouse he'd fixed near the wharves.
He said it did him well enough for summer
When he was off so much and winter time
He didn't have to keep big fires up
Same as he would in any island house.
He wasn't sociable, though real obliging,
And always did good turns for those who asked
him.
"Poor Seth," I heard the older women say.

It took me quite a while to find out why.
But Sarah Stanley told me all about it
One late September spell I boarded with her.

It must have happened fifty years ago
For he was getting on towards seventy
And that first voyage he made at seventeen.
His Aunt, Miss Hassie Rowe, his father's sister,
Declared he was too young and did her best
To keep him back, though it was she that drove him
Because she nagged about the wood-box so,
And then those words they had over his smoking.
Those two were all the Rowes left living there
In an old clapboard house on Maypole Point.
'Twas a hard place to wring a living from,
No kind of beach below, just jagged rocks
And firs and spruces crowding up behind
So thick it was a steady fight to keep
Those trees at decent distance from what land
Had been already cleared. Folks wondered how
One woman and a boy could make a go
Of such a place, but still they did it somehow,
For Hassie Rowe was smarter than a whip.
It beat the pattern how she managed it
Those fourteen years, for Seth was only three

The time his folks died. No, it wasn't easy,—
Fetching good earth there by the tea-cupful
To make a garden; chopping wood in summer,
Splitting and piling it against cold weather.
It took a lot to keep the wind out winters.
I guess it must have seemed to her sometimes
That she'd been keeping up the fires forever.
Seth flung those very words back at her once
The time that set-to came about his smoking.
A pipe meant only fire to Hassie Rowe,
Just that and nothing more. She lived in dread
Of fire. It had driven them apart,
First that eternal carrying in of wood.
"Don't you go off and leave the wood-box empty."
He heard it twenty times a day it seemed,
Or else,—"We're nearly out of kindling splits."
And when he bought that corn-cob pipe she'd jeered,
"Think you're a man, I 'spose! Well, not in here.
"You won't smoke under any roof of mine."
And so he made his plans to ship aboard
A vessel sailing shortly from the Port.

He'd got past his first hankering to go
When the day came. I guess one word from her

And he'd have stayed. She knew but couldn't say it.
They both were stubborn and they had their pride
Same as the Rowe high cheek bones, only his
Had color on them, and his eyes not yet
Sea-narrowed, were as blue as her's had been.
Before she'd taken to those spectacles.
He saw their rims shine as she watched him go.
She stood there in the doorway, spare and gray,
With those delphinium clumps on either side.
They kept their silence. Both were near to crying,
But neither guessed it.

"Well, good-bye, Aunt Hassie."

She didn't speak, just shifted down a step
And kept her eyes right on him.

"It'll be
"A good eight months from what they say," he said.
"Yes, all of that," she answered, "maybe longer."
He went inside and got his seaman's bag,
Then tossed it on the doorstep and took out
A pipe. He stood there jamming the tobacco
Down with his thumb.

"Seems like you could'a waited."

Was all she said to that. He tossed the match
Away, but she bent down and caught it up.

"Watch out you don't go set the place a-fire!"
She spoke up sharp, "The grass is dry as tinder
"After this draught."
She snapped a shriveled seed-pod
Off the delphinium, all mostly past
Except a spike or two of bloom that showed
Steel-blue and bright against the greying clapboards.
"Good-bye." he said, and started up the path
That joined the town road.
"Seth!" she called to him.
He turned back quick enough. She must have wanted
To seize that bag and make him come inside,
And beg him not to go away to sea.
But when he'd got abreast of her again,
She only said, "There ain't four sticks of stove-wood
"Left in the box, and not a mite of kindling."
He went round to the woodpile by the shed
And took a good while over it. Each stick
He chose painstakingly and fitted firm
Into his arm-crotch. He knew every piece—
Bark, knot-holes, twists and all, for he had cut
And split each one himself. Trip after trip
He made and never dropped a one or stepped
Off of the oilcloth strips he'd helped his aunt

Lay down to save wear on the kitchen floor.
He'd never stacked so many sticks as neatly.—
The stove-lengths to one side, the kindling handy.
He even fetched a bucketful of chips.
"So's it'll kindle quicker in the morning."
He told her as he shut the cover down.
"This ought to last you through tomorrow night."
She followed him out to the path again.
This time they didn't either say a word,
Only when he looked back at her she saw
There was a new line underneath his lip,
The skin showed white where his set teeth had pressed it.

Down by the fish wharves Seth hailed Old Man Gilley.
He was a harmless, hobbling, scatter-wit
Who did odd jobs for anyone who'd have him.
He was a laughing stock, and not too bright,
But he could make out with an axe or fish line.
"Seth Rowe!" he piped up high and shrill and chuckled

Into his beard. "Seth Rowe—He had to go!"
He sang it like a tune and grinned so wide
His eyes sunk into little slits between
Their fringe of wrinkles.
"Going far,—got bag,"
He said and pointed. When they got up close
He whispered like it was some kind of secret.
"One place is same's another,—you stay home
"And watch the sparks fly."
"Now you listen here,"
Seth told him plain and held him with his eye.
"You recollect the bargain that we made
"Right here last week?—You ain't forgot already?"
"Plenty to burn," the old Man shrilled, and nodded
His wild grey head, "Make sparks fly for Miss Hassie."
"That's right," Seth said, "and see you don't forget it.
"Or you won't get a cent of what I promised.
"You fill that wood box clear up to the top
"And don't you skip a day. If she needs more
'You haul some from that pile cut in the woods.
"But no birch logs, remember, she don't like 'em.
"The bark makes too much blaze to suit her notions."

He'd got his friend Will Sprague to row him out
To where the schooner *"Kate-Matilda"* lay
Moored off of Fernald's Point. She'd looked real fine
When he'd been out before to say he'd go.
But now he didn't take much satisfaction
Seeing her fresh paint and those brand new sails
That would be taking him away so far.
He let Will pull the oars and bring the dory
Out through the Channel that he knew so well.
The tide was turning, it would serve them out
Between the islands and beyond,—
He slumped
Down in the stern seat, bag between his knees.
He was afraid that Will might ask him questions.
He wouldn't know what answers were expected.
He didn't know how men should act before
They set off on a voyage to foreign parts.
He fumbled with the bag to keep him busy,
And something hard and unfamiliar bulged
Under the canvas. When he drew it out
There was Great-Uncle Ben's pipe with the mermaid
Carved on the bowl and stem, years old, it was,
And always kept real choice beside the conch shell
Up on the parlor mantelpiece. Aunt Hassie
Must have contrived to slip it in his bag.

It wasn't like her to do such a thing.
He'd sneaked off with it once three years before
And smoked it secretly behind the shed.
That was his first try. It had made his dizzy,
But it had made a man out of a boy.
He'd put it back and she had never known.
Or had she all along? Was this her way
Perhaps of telling him,—or just a present?
It certainly was queer for her to give him,
Feeling the way she did.
"Hi, there, wake up!"
Will shouted at him, "We're alongside now."
He stuffed it back, shook hands, and climbed aboard.

'Twas seven months before the *"Kate-Matilda"*
Put in at Java. They'd been longer out
What with bad storms and stopping for repairs
In ports they hadn't any call to touch at.
Seth Rowe had made a pretty able seaman.
He had a quick eye and he knew the sea
And ships, but still he didn't take to water
The way he had to land. He felt distrust
Of such long tossing wastes of salty blue.
Strange ports and islands only made him feel
More lonesome for the ones he'd left behind.

Smoke curling up from any sort of clutter
Of huts most anywhere would turn him faint
With homesickness. He'd lie still in his bunk
In the off-watches, thinking how it must
Be looking in Aunt Hassie's kitchen then,
Or how the fire in the air-tight stove
Glowed red behind the mica window pane
With criss-cross iron bars, while all about
He heard and hated seamens' talk and snores.
And up on deck the very silence seemed
Unfriendly to him and the tropic stars
Too near and bright, not like the high cold planets
He'd learned to steer by on the coast of Maine.
Nothing disturbed this longing that he felt
For anything familiar,—Yokohama
He turned his back on. All Japan it seemed
Was but a country fashioned out of toys,
Of colored paper strips and folding screens,
With little yellow men who smiled sly smiles.
China, to Seth Rowe, only meant a river
Carrying a hundred evil, foreign smells,
And now the men were telling him of Java.
It was a first-rate place, they said, the women—
There was the coast. Seth strained his eyes to see it.
A first-rate place, perhaps there'd be a letter

Waiting him there.
He had to watch the others
Read their's the night they went ashore. He heard
The sound of island names as they sat swapping
Fragments of news, now over four months old.
It seemed to Seth that he could fairly smell
The woodsmoke from home chimneys, see the light
From Baker's Island. Well, she might have written.

Next afternoon he went ashore with three
Ship-mates. They drank sweet native wines that made
Their feet unsteady and their pulses hum,
And later on they found a place where girls,
Brown and slim-bodied, sidled up to them
With red hibiscus flowers in their hair.
And there was one who smiled at Seth. She held
A monkey close between her round, bare breasts.
He turned away confused, it shamed him somehow.
He went ouside to wait for his companions.
There was a bench and table spread with paper
And ink and quills for sailors to write home.
Laboriously he started:—
"Dear Aunt Hassie,"
"I take my pen in hand to write these lines.

"This finds me well. I trust you are the same.
"They say we will make home in three more months.
"I hope Tom Gilley's sticking to his bargain
"And keeps the wood-box full. I've seen Japan
"And China——"
He broke off to watch the sun
Setting in tropic heat behind a screen
Of grasses woven criss-cross like the bars
Across the mica window in their stove.
Red flowers, heavy scented, grew about,
Shrill parrots called, birds preened unearthly feathers,
Laughter and tinkling music filled the air.
He dipped his quill to pen a final word.
"This Java, that we're anchored off," he wrote,
"Is a poor place. Good bye. Yours truly,
Seth."

That night aboard the ship when all the rest
Were sleeping or carousing off ashore,
He took out once again the shawl he'd bought
In China for Aunt Hassie. It was silk
Embroidered thick with butterflies and flowers.
He hoped she'd like it well enough to wear
To church on summer Sundays.

They met with more delays. Seth took it hard
Because the Captain chose a longer route
Back home. It meant a good six weeks beside
And he grew glum and even talked real bitter,
Although the others shrugged and chided him.
'Twas only what a sailor must expect,
Yes, it was like that when you went to sea.
Seth heard them through before he broke out sudden,
"I ain't a-goin' to sea no more," he said.
As time went on he didn't smoke so much.
His bunk mate thought he'd run short of tobacco
And offered him his pouch. Seth shook his head.
"I've kind of lost my taste for smoking, Dan."
He told the other lamely, and he vowed
All to himself that he would give it up
Once and for all. Maybe his Aunt was right
About that,—anyhow it didn't mean
So much right now. How he would keep the wood-box
Full to the brim. He'd chop the biggest wood-pile
Anywhere on the Island and he'd buy
A bigger, better stove than that old one
Aunt Hassie had put up with all these years.

He clung to thoughts like that and turned them over
And over in his mind those last long months.
The house, the fire and Aunt Hassie seemed
The only sure things in that shifting world
Of changing winds and watery heights and hollows.

Seth fretted when the Captain picked a course
That brought them from the East, round Bunker's
Ledge
Instead of through the Thoroughfare and then,
Past Stonington and by Bass Harbor Bar
Where he'd have had a sight of home and seen
A faint blue thread of chimney smoke perhaps
Even before the grey house came in view.
He didn't wait for any of the rest
When once the *"Kate-Matilda"* dropped her anchor.
He let a boat down, and rowed off before
A single one from shore could reach the side.
He didn't care how much the Captain swore,
For he was through with winds and waterways.
He'd stick to stable things and permanent,—
Houses and folks that you could count on staying
Same as they'd always been. The crew could jeer
And call him land-lubber if they'd a mind to.
He'd got back home and that was all that mattered,

Except to keep the bundle at his feet
From getting wet. It wouldn't do to spoil
That shawl he'd been so careful of for months.

'Twas late July, he'd been out most a year,
The noon sun beat down hot and he could smell
The spiciness of bay and balsam needles.
The tide was running fast through Herring Gut
And that made quite a chop out round their point.
"Quicker to beach the boat here by the fish-
wharves,"
He told himself, "and walk up round the shore,
"Than if I try to land down by our rocks.
"And I'll surprise Aunt Hassie too this way."
He brought the boat in, dragged it past the tide line,
And then he ran so fast he sent the pebbles
Rattling from under his great heavy sea-boots.
Most all the Island folks were eating dinner
Up in the village,—only Old Man Gilley
Was pottering among some lobster-traps
And cluttered boat parts.

"Hi, Seth Rowe!" he called
In that shrill voice the boy knew all too well,

"Hold on a minute, there,—wait half a jiffy,
"I've got a lot of things to tell you 'bout!"
Seth shook his head and sped on up the path
Between the spruces. He could hear Tom Gilley
Plodding hot on his trail. He felt annoyed.
"Why can't he leave me be?" he thought, and called
Across his shoulder, "Can't stop now to gab!"
But still the Old Man kept on after him
Panting and stumbling over roots and stumps.
"You, Seth," he shrilled, "You listen here to me,
" 'Fore you get round the Point,—I got to tell you—"
He wheezed, then hurried on, "It wasn't me,
"Honest it wasn't, Seth,—no matter what
"Anyone tells you, no, Siree it wasn't.
"I done the way you said. She always had
"A wood-box full. I didn't miss a day."
"All right," Seth snapped, not stopping to look round,

Or heeding half he said, "You'll get your money,
"Go on back now. "Drat that Old Fool," he thought.
His eyes were straining as he came out full
Into the clearing from the crowded trees.
"Gorry, I'm blinded with the sun," he said,
And rubbed his eyes, for he could see the path
Worn brown between the waving, red-top grass
There at his feet. It lead straight on to—nothing.
He couldn't seem to breathe or feel at all.
Yet still his feet kept going on and on
Straight to the doorstep.

There it was, and there
On either side delphinium clumps rose spiked
And blue against a blank blue wall of sky.
A pile of split wood had been neatly stacked
Off by the well and tool house,—that was all,
That and the doorstep and delphinium,
To show there'd ever been a dwelling there.

The sun beat hot and yellow on his head,
And everything in sight. Bees buzzed and clustered
In the delphinium. His world was gone,

All that he'd counted on as sure and steady
For years to come.

Nothing left now for him
But to return to shifting winds and water.
He stirred himself and threw the knotted bundle
Down on the doorstep, then he passed on through,—
Between the blue delphinium clumps and on
Into the ash and ruins through a door
No longer there.

## *THIS IS THE PLACE*

This is the place where hills loom far,
Where the scattered farms and islands are,
And all the marching trees.

Where fields lie tawny and roads twist brown;
Where the wharves are listing and tumbled down
With salt tides round their knees.

This is the place where orchard boughs
Are sea-ward crooked, and from each square house
Wood-smoke climbs the skies;

Where old farm wagons are painted blue,
Where every sail has a patch or two,
And the windows shine like eyes.

## *THE OLD GODS COME TO SOMESVILLE, MAINE.*

That Enoch Pray was quite a character
Back in his young days on the coast of Maine.
There's lots of stories still they tell about him
Round Somesville, Prettymarsh and Cranberry Isles,
Only the one I've always fancied most
His Grandson told me once,—he had it straight
From his own father.

Well, it seems that Enoch
Got hankering, between the hay and grass,
Round seventeen, to go to sea. His folks
Were set against it and the island girls
All tried to keep him back, for he was smart;
Stood six foot three and then some in his socks,
With deep-set eyes, as keen as any gulls,
And thick hair colored like mahogany.
He wasn't pledged to any at that time,
So none of them could hold him and he shipped
From Portland on a vessel round the Horn,
Engaged in Eastern trade and merchandise.
Off to Bombay and such far distant ports,

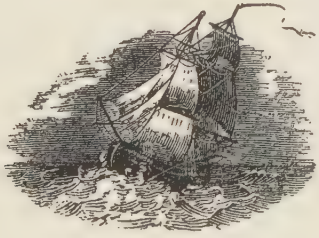
Sure to be out a year and maybe longer.

The crew were mostly older but for one,
A Portland boy named Brewer, Enoch's age.
So it was only natural those two
Should be as thick as tar inside a week.
The Captain swore he'd never seen their like
For foolishness. The pranks they could contrive
Kept the ship humming and their mates complaining,
Though they were good as any hands aboard.
They earned their pay, for all the tricks they played.
The Captain gave them fines and extra watches
And did the best he could to sober them,
But they were lively as two-year-old colts
And twice as smart.

It came about like this.
They anchored in a harbor near Bombay
Where they'd put in to fetch a special cargo,
Only as it turned out, they'd struck a day
That was some sort of heathen festival.
That meant that you could no more hire a native
To fetch that cargo to the waterfront
Than if you'd asked them to cut off their heads.

The Captain grumbled, but he knew their ways.
"Well, boys," he said, "we're out of luck this time
"And no mistake, so go ashore and get
"Your fill of folks and fashions thereabouts.
"Get tipsy if you want; see all the sights,
"Only don't go and rile those natives any,
"For they're a touchy lot around these parts.
"I've had experience enough to last me.
"I don't want any more disputes to settle."

Enoch and Brewer went in the first boat.
But once they got ashore they left the rest
To go manoeuvring off by themselves.
I guess from all that Enoch said years later
There wasn't any corner of that port
They didn't poke their noses in, those two.
And then they tried some kind of native drink
That tasted good and made them feel as lively



As if they'd eaten pieces of mad dog,
The way you'll hear the saying sometimes.—Well,
To get back to the story, they felt gay
And up to mischief, for the pair of them
Were seventeen, and this their first voyage out.
They happened, pretty soon, upon a temple,
Some kind of heathen place, with domes and bells,
And steps with people going up and down them,
All shades of brown, in sandals, robes, and turbans,
Taking their foreign gibberish together.

The boys looked on awhile, then Enoch said:—
"Come on in, Dan, let's have a look around."
Brewer was willing, so they tip-toed in
After a group of natives. They kept quiet
And real respectful for a spell until
They'd got their fill of all the goings on.
So then they up and slipped out through a door
That lay off to one side behind a curtain.
Those priests, or ministers, or what-you-call-ems
Were much too occupied with making motions,
The people all too busy saying prayers
To notice what became of those two sailors.
Enoch and Dan were in a mood to try
Most any door they saw, but even they

Got sobered pretty quick when they stepped through
Into that little dim-lit, secret room,—
An inner place, no bigger than a pantry
Back home, but this was decked all out in pictures,
With precious stones and dear knows what besides.
"Gorry," Dan said to Enoch, kind of awed,
"This here's some kind of private meeting-house,
"We'd better beat it back before they find us.
"Would you say this gim-crack was gold or gilt?
"Wish I could take it back to my girl Lucy."
But Enoch had his eye on higher things.
He'd gone up close to two old Heathen figures,
Half-naked Gods, or Buddhas, or such like,
Carved out of clear white stone with strange designs
Painted in colors. Side by side they sat,
Each with a hand raised and their knees criss-crossed
On blocks of ebony. They weren't so large
But what they could be slipped inside a coat
And carried so by anyone with muscle.
"These must be extra special Gods," said Enoch
Real low to Dan, "what say we hook the pair?"
'Twas just pure devilment and the Old Nick
Inside those boys that put them up to it.
Not that they meant to stir up trouble, really,
They didn't stop to think 'twas any more

Than stealing gates away on Hallowe'en
Or hiding the mate's boots when he was sleeping.
They watched their chance and slipped out same's
they came
When all the folks were doubled up in prayer,
And no one saw them glide along the shadows,
Or noticed each one had a bulging jacket,
And so by crooked, glaring, mud-baked streets
They reached the waterfront and found their boat.
No one was by to see or question them
As they rowed off.

"Best keep 'em hid," Dan said,
"In case the Captain should get wind of it
"And make us give 'em back, and all our trouble
"For nothing."

Enoch found some tarpaulin
Under the stern seat, and he wrapt the pair
Into a bundle.

"There, Old Boys," he said,
"I've got the two of you lashed good and snug.
"When you see daylight next 'twon't be no place
"You ever set your slanting heathen eyes on."

But Dan sang out:—

"Hi, look alive there, can't you?
"We're most alongside. You go first and drop
"Me down a line, and then you haul 'em up."
Luck stayed right with them. No one was on deck
To see them climb aboard with their queer bundle.
They stowed it under Enoch's bunk and when
The other boats came back from shore, those two
Were lolling in the shadow of the poop
As innocent as could be. All the rest
Came scrambling up and calling for the Captain.
It seemed they'd scented trouble back in port.
They couldn't make out what it was about
But half an hour or so before they'd seen
A crowd come pouring down the temple steps,
And the priests talking to them real excited.
Then there was hurrying from house to house,
And jabberings such as they had never heard.
Real ugly looks began to come their way,
And one brown chap that knew a little English
Had made them understand two Gods were missing
Out of the inner shrine where only priests
Might enter veiled and bowed on holy days.
If strangers from the ships had done this thing,—

"There'll be a rumpus sure," they told the Captain,
"The way they're acting up. Good thing we didn't
"Set foot inside their gaudy meetin' house."
The Captain asked a lot of questions then
But all he learned was that they meant to search
All vessels in the harbor.
"Let 'em come,"
He said at last, "I'll give 'em leave to search
"Her stem to stern. Guess that'll satisfy 'em.
"There wouldn't anyone be fool enough
"To tamper with a pair of heathen Gods.
"Damned sight too risky business messin' up
"In what those natives worship. No siree,
"They wouldn't stop at nothin' once they're roused."
He put his glass up to his eye and nodded,
"Six boats are rowing out, two headed this way."

Enoch and Dan they hadn't made a sign
All through the talk. They kept their mouths shut tight
And looked real unconcerned, but neither one
Was near so chipper as he'd been before,
What with the drink they'd had about worn off
And those boats coming on as grim as death.
They kind of passed a look, one to the other,

That meant that bundle must be dumped out soon
Without attracting anyone's suspicion,
So Dan he stayed on deck with all the rest
To see the native boats, while Enoch slipped
Off to the foc'sle. When he heard them pull
Alongside, and the sound of talk and feet
There on the decks above, he made his way
Down to his bunk and got that bundle out.
He crept along the bows. He knew 'twas safe
With all the rest of them collected aft
If he could heave it in without a splash.
So out he crawled and lowered it a little,
Though 'twas a heavy line to pay out steady.
He held on till the tarpaulin touched water,
And watched it disappear without a sound.
Those natives didn't leave a spot untouched
Aboard that vessel, and the crew all grumbled
At having lockers pawed and chests ransacked.
The Captain hushed them up though double quick.
He'd had too much experience with natives
Not to be real polite and genteel mannered,
And offer drink and say his ship was theirs
To search, and how it surely was a pity
They'd lost their Gods and how he hoped they'd
find them.

They snooped about as still and quick as shadows,
But when the last brown man had clambered down
And all the boats a good half mile away,
The Captain mopped his face and swore like blazes
His favorite cuss-words he was that relieved.
"I tell you what, boys," he said, "I put through
"A bad half hour, for they're like to go
"Off under you like so much gunpowder
"Unless you handle them with gloves, and then
"You can't tell what might touch the whole lot off!"
Next day things were no better,—not a native
Would touch a bale, or help load on that cargo,
More mutterings went on, more ugly looks,
More trouble all the time.

"We'd better go,"
The Captain said, "I'd sooner lose the cargo
"And all the cash it brings than have a rumpus.

"I'll pick up what I can from other ports."
So late that night they hauled the anchor up
And put out under cover of the dark.

Enoch and Dan they never slipped a word
Or let on by a look the whole voyage back.
After that trip they took their different ways.
Dan went out west to join the forty-niners,
And stayed for good in California,
While Enoch Pray got married and set up
In Somesville where his wife's folks kept a store.
They were quite prosperous for then and Enoch
Built him a house, with pillars, on a hill,
It had a Captain's walk so he could see
The hills behind and all Somes Sound in front,
And nearer by an inlet where they built
And launched stout sailing vessels, made of pine
And native spruce-wood.

Enoch Pray he wasn't
Much drawn to stores or farming, so he took
A hand at building ships himself. He kept
Part interest in most,—but there was one
He built alone, according to some notions

That he'd worked out of how a ship might be
With deeper keel, low decks and narrow bow,
With taller masts and greater spread of canvas
Than any round those parts. His neighbors smiled
And shook their heads and vowed 'twould never do
For heavy weather, or ride out a gale.
And that made Enoch's dander rise until
He swore he'd sail her round Good Hope himself
If he could raise a crew of men to suit him.
It took him quite a spell to get enough
Willing to join him in the enterprize,
But he made out at last and started off.
Just twenty-five he was then, to a day,
Leaving a wife and two young children home.
He'd named his ship *"Adventure,"* and she proved
All that he'd said for her sea-worthiness.
Yes, he made good his boasts and won a lot
Of money from the wagers folks had laid
That he'd come limping back inside three months.
He stopped off at a heap of foreign ports
And fetched back goods to prove that he had been there.
Then, coming round the coast of India,
He got to thinking of that other voyage
And how those old Gods he and Dan had hooked

And carried out inside their coats, were like
As not still where he'd dumped them in the harbor.
The fancy took him then to get them back.
He couldn't seem to put it from his mind,
And so he made excuse to take on cargo
He didn't really want, so's they could anchor
At the same mooring they had been before.
He had the anchor cast down neat as if
He'd set a buoy there eight years before.
He gave his men the day to go ashore.
But for himself he fetched a native diver
And sent him down on an exploring trip.
Made out he'd just dropped something overboard
And offered such a handsome sum the fellow
Would have brought up the harbor if he'd asked it.
He fetched the bundle up, a bit too green
And barnacled to match the Captain's story.
But he got paid his fee and something over,
And Enoch kept it hidden in chest
Till they were well out on the homeward way.
He found them none the worse for being under
Sea-water all those years. The tarpaulin
Had helped protect them though the paint was soaked
Most off in places, only here and there

Dim colors showed where a design had been
Along the garment folds that fell away
Leaving the bodies bare on either side.
Each hand was raised as he remembered it.
The legs crossed and the full lips curling faintly
In a queer kind of brooding Eastern smile.
He kept them in his cabin locked away
Along with all his charts and maps and gim-cracks
And so they came at last to Somesville, Maine.

Enoch he set them up by his front door,
A God on either side. They must have looked
Real queer along with hollyhocks and phlox
And the delphinium his wife had planted.
But there they sat and watched the seasons through
For quite a spell, and folks got used to them
Although some always said they were a scandal
With evil, grinning faces and no clothes
To speak of on them. Enoch always laughed

Whenever any such remarks were passed.
He hadn't got his corners much rubbed off
In spite of getting older. He was one
Who couldn't bear to act like other folks.
"Rather be different than right, he would."
They said of him and it was near the truth.
And then one time when he was on a voyage
To the Barbados with a load of lumber
His second daughter, Ellen, tripped and fell
As she ran down the steps. She hit her head
Against the right hand God. She struck full force.
The stone was hard and stove a place right in
Above her forehead. She lay in a stupor
For weeks on end and never was the same
As she had been before. Her father claimed
She could have done it by the shore the same,
Or on the stone steps to the meeting house.
But still the fact remained, it was those idols
And everybody thought he'd ought to put them
Up attic if he wouldn't throw them out.
It wasn't two years afterwards there came
A queer, forlorn old fellow peddling shawls
And beads and such contraptions from the East.
He was as brown as any last years' pine cone.
He wore a robe and sandals on his feet,

And a bright turban wound about his head.
Not many bought his wares and some were scared
To have him on the doorstep, though he spoke
Soft and respectful and he looked half starved.
Enoch was home from sea a spell that time,
And he and Sam his boy were in the yard
Sorting out early apples into barrels
When he came up. They saw him stand stock still
There on the walk between the flower borders.
He let his pack drop from him and his knees
Double up under as he dropped down quick
To bow his head again and then again
Over his folded hands. His lips made sounds
Like nothing ever heard in town before.
"Look, Pa, I do believe he's saying prayers."
Sam said real low and motioned to his mother
To come out from the kitchen ell and see,
With Ruth and Ellen, Deborah and John.
They gathered in a little knot together
And watched the ceremony going on.
It must have been a sight to see him so
There on the gravel walk between the dahlias
And orange marigolds, with bees and crickets
Mingling their hums and chirpings with his prayers,
For prayers they were, there wasn't any doubt

Of that the way he droned and bent his head.
When he looked up at last and saw the children
And Enoch and his wife, he kind of backed
Away from the stone figures. Then he came
Up close and talked some kind of broken English
That he'd picked up and even Enoch couldn't
Make out the half of what he tried to say.
Only 'twas plain he recognized the idols.
They were far older than the hills, he said,
And pointed off to the Mount Desert range
Looming like pale blue scallops in the haze
Of early Fall. Yes, they were old and sacred,
Worshipped for generations by his people.
There had been mourning ever since the day
They had been stolen from their temple room.
It was not fitting they should sit exposed
To wind and rain and to the common gaze
Of passersby. No, such things must not be,
Though he was poor and far away from home
He would give everything inside his pack
Besides the bracelet made of twisted gold
Upon his arm, if he might buy them back.
It wasn't right to keep old Gods away
From their own people. Enoch turned away
He'd always had a fancy for those two

And all this talk the fellow'd given him
Had only made him think the more, although
His wife kept tugging at his sleeve and saying
She'd just as leave to have the pack instead.
She'd like a brand new India shawl and beads.
But Enoch wouldn't hear of parting with them,
And told the fellow not to hang around
There on his knees to clutter up the path.
He took his pack and went off down the road
A ways and then he trudged back up again.
Enoch was kind of peppery dispositioned,
For he was used to rule the quarter-deck
And have folks take his orders good and quick.
So he was real put-out and bellowed at him
To go away and not show up round there
Or he'd take out a warrant to arrest him
For vagrancy. The peddler heard him out
Real still and timid, yet he was persistent,
And stubborn like a child that won't give in.
Once more he tried to say a lot of things
That Enoch wouldn't listen to, but Sam,
The oldest boy, made out as how he wanted
That they should put the idols under cover.
He got himself worked up into a tantrum
Explaining how 'twas wrong to keep them out

In every sort of weather; they were used
To better treatment, temples and sweet smells.
He said that they could bring disaster down
On those who didn't treat them right, for they
Were old and powerful Gods. Sam said it made
Him shivery to hear, but little John
Began to pelt the Peddler with green apples
Until he turned to take the road again.

The story went all over town, of course,
And that next Hallowe'en some boys got gay.
They carted both the figures off by night
And hid them up in Old Man Blodgett's hay loft.
'Twas March before Jim Blodgett pitched out one
In a forkful of hay. It startled him,
When it came thumping down so white and heavy.
He let out a big yell and that old bull
That he was foddering, took fright and tossed him.
He was laid up in bed two months or more
And always limped and had a lame right shoulder

To show for it. Well, that made Enoch trouble.
Some even said he'd ought to pay for damage
And get rid of those heathen nuisances.
Enoch got mad at that and vowed he wouldn't.
'Twasn't through any fault of his, he said.
The boys had stolen them from his front door
And so he wasn't liable, beside
Everyone knew the Blodgett bull was ugly.
They couldn't blame him for its pesky horns.

Spring came. He set the Gods by his front door,
Only he took and fixed them to the steps
With plaster. But his neighbors went on talking.
Long about August and the hay all in
There came the wildest sort of thunderstorm
Within the memory of man. Bolts broke
On every side and blinding flashes played
In jags of fire on the lightning rods.
One hit the steeple of the meeting-house
And splintered it to matchwood, ripping down
The side and tearing up the ground three feet
In places, and another struck the barn
Behind the Pray house, 'twas ablaze in no time
With flames so high folks saw them miles away.
A scary sight they were, too, rearing up.

Enoch and Sam ran out and tried to keep
The sparks from catching on the house and shed
With pails of water, for they couldn't fight
The fire once that hay got burning so.
It looked as if there wouldn't be a shingle
Left of the whole place,—only rain commenced
Just as the shed caught and the roof took fire.
It poured such torrents down, that quenched the
flames,
Although by then the barn and stock were lost.
All through the storm those Gods sat out in front
Between the Pray door and the hollyhocks,
And drenched delphinium. Snapped twigs and leaves
Whipped at them in the driving wind and rain
And folks who lived across the way all told
How those two showed unearthly sharp and white
There in the flickering light and pale green flashes.
Miss Hepsa Jordan always did maintain
That from her window opposite she saw
The pair of them unfold their criss-cross legs
And rise up in their places. 'Twas the light
No doubt, but she insisted it was true
And that one God put out a hand and helped
Himself to one of those bright lightning darts.
She said she saw it resting like a ball

Of orange in his upturned hand. Next day
She pointed out a sort of blackened spot
Burned in the stone,—it seemed to bear her out.
But then the town was ready to believe
Most any yarn folks spun, and so it went
Until at last a delegation called
To ask that Enoch Pray get rid of them.
They'd give him four weeks' time, they said, to do it.
They weren't particular except to have
That heathen pair well out of the town limits.
Enoch he made his usual remarks
About folks' own belongings being theirs
And no one else's business, and how some
Would lap up any foolish kind of talk.
He didn't give his word and when they left
The others told him he could have his choice
Of doing it himself, or they'd act for him
When the four weeks were up.

Poor Hannah Pray
Was pretty near distracted by that time.
She'd put up with a lot from Enoch since
The two of them got married, though he loved her
According to his lights. She did entreat him
To come round to his senses, "After all,"
She said, "good will of neighbors means a sight
"More comfort in the end than having two
"Ugly old idols cluttering up the steps.
"Mind, Enoch, I don't hold with all these notions.
"It stands to reason most of it ain't true,
"And still, I'd sleep lots easier at night
"If they was gone. I haven't asked you much
"In all these years,—It seems as if you might.
" 'Twon't hurt you none to go against your pride
"This once, and I'd be real obliged to you."
He didn't say out if he would or not,
But in a week or so he called young Sam
To harness up the buggy right away.
And when he had and brought it round, there was
His father prying off the two old Gods.
He must have meant to smash them with a hammer.
He had one by him, but he couldn't do it
When the time came, I guess. He dumped them in
Under the buggy seat and took the reins.

He turned the horse into an old wood road
Not used for much but hauling logs and ice
In wintertime and three miles farther on
They reached a little pond between the hills
With spruce and birch and maple trees around it.
Enoch drew up and made Sam tie the horse.
There was an old punt beached along the shore.
Enoch pushed off in it, with Sam: the idols
Stowed at their feet. They rowed out quite a ways
To where it must have been near twelve foot deep,
But still and clear, so that the bottom showed
Real plain, with fishes streaking, dim and swift
Under the shadow of their boat. Then Enoch
Leaned out and heaved the Gods in one by one.
The punt rocked on the ripples that they made
Until the water cleared and smoothed again
So they could make those shapes out on the bottom,—
Paler than quartz in moonlight, more unearthly
There under water even from on land.
"I guess that ought to keep folks still awhile!"
Enoch said grimly.

They went straight on home
And he was off next day to take a vessel

As far as Georgia with a load of stone
From the Sound quarry.

Every one in town
Was turning to, to help rebuild the steeple
And other damage done the meeting-house
When lightning struck it in the storm. That meant
A lot of work before the frost set in
And then considerable repairs inside.
Enoch he'd promised to stop off in Boston
And fetch them back a brand new weathervane
To top the steeple off,—a bigger one
With lots more gilding than they'd had before.
He had his streaks of generosity,
For all his knotty ways and set ideas.
Well, everyone in Somesville leant a hand,
And long around December it was done,
Ready for meeting to be held once more.
They didn't have a preacher regular
Those days one drove out once a month from Eden,
And Prettymarsh or Ellsworth, so they planned
To have him consecrate it his next visit.
Enoch was back with the new weathervane.
It took twelve men to get it set in place

Before the day. The women all turned to
And scrubbed and swept and made new cushion seats
To fit the square box pews, and hung a curtain
Across the pulpit, so no one should see it
Until the Minister should pull a rope
When it was time to show the congregation.
By Friday noon 'twas done. They made the doors
And windows fast before they went back home.
By Sunday it was bitter cold, but still
The pews were filled with people in their best,
And even babies came wrapped up in shawls.
The stove gave out some heat, but still more smoke.
Frost patterned every window and the bell rope
That dangled in the vestibule was stiff
With cold. Miss Hepsa Jordan's breath blew out
Like kettle steam at the melodian,
And that red curtain hung before the pulpit
Swayed in the wind that came in round the sills.
But everyone was eager and uplifted.
There wouldn't be another such event
All winter like as not, and so they sang
"Old Hundred" all together, strong and fervent
So that it echoed clear up in the rafters.
The Reverend Thompkins made a prayer and then

Spoke a few words by way of consecration.
"Oh, Lord," he said, one hand laid on the cord,
That would draw back the curtain at a tug,
"Bless this Thy house and all now gathered in it.
"Bless every beam and rafter; board and stone
"From roof to cellar; weather-vane and steeple.
"Let all things living and inanimate
"Within these walls praise Thy great name forever."
His hand moved quickly and the pulpit showed
Behind him there for every eye to see.
A kind of gasp went round from mouth to mouth,
But no one moved, not even Reverend Thompkins,
For just above him, one on either side
Of the great opened Bible on the desk,
Sat those two Heathen Gods,—a little green
From being on the bottom of that pond,
But grinning faintly, and between them there
Hunched in the preacher's chair, all of a heap,

Was that brown turbaned Peddler, frozen stiff.

Well, to this day there isn't one can say
How he'd got in. No window had been forced,
No door unlocked. Sam Pray sneaked off alone
Up to the pond. The ice was thick enough
To bear him, so he walked across and back.
Look as he would he couldn't find a hole
Or any kind of marking on the ice.
No, no one could explain the thing away.
Nothing to do but bury the poor fellow
The best they could and give up asking questions.
It wasn't easy digging frosty ground,
And if some grumbled who could blame them much?
But afterwards they held a special meeting
About the Gods and called on Parson Thompkins
To help decide how to get rid of them.
He told them plainly that the strange affair
Had shaken him considerable. He gave
As his advice they shouldn't smash the two.
"Such evil worship as they knew is over
"And done with now," he said, "they have been blessed

"Into the service of the Lord by me.
"Besides, now that I come to think of it
"I've read such figures bring a fancy price
"In other parts. I move we pack and send them
"By the next vessel headed Boston way.
"We need a new bell badly,—what more fitting
"Then we should have one cast with what they
bring?"

So that was how it was, and even Enoch
Didn't try holding out against the Parson.
They say the pair fetched quite a handsome sum
In Boston some weeks later,—anyway
The bell they bought has got a pleasant tone.
I ought to know, I've heard it times enough
When I've been passing Somesville on a Sunday.

## *THE OLD PASTURE*

No more cows in the pasture,
No more sheep on the hill,
Only winds in the grass and bay
And a field lark calling shrill
And sweet through the hot blue hours of
June,
Here where there used to be
Half a hundred nibbling sheep
In a gray-backed company.

No more cows in the pasture,
No more sheep on the hill,
But often I've heard a cowbell clank
When nights are silver-still,
Over the slopes of fern and bay,
From hollow and grassy steep,—
Often I've seen the moon shine white
On the backs of moving sheep.

## *BATHSHEBA BERRY*

On nights like this when fog's in thicker'n tar;
And whatever wind there is, is dead from the East;
When the ranks of wet trees creak and drip in the dark,
And the lighthouse fog-bell tolls on, solemn and hollow,—
I get to thinking about Bathsheba Berry,
And that queer trip she made to the outer island
To tend the foreign women through her labour.
Not that the thing itself was more than common,—
She'd fetched most of the young ones thereabouts
Into the world. There wasn't a better midwife
Clear up and down the coast, in Portland even.
Her name's a by-word still, and they do say

That she's been seen about at times of birth.
Two years ago a wife Bass Harbor way
Was taken long before her time, in winter,
Her husband off aboard a coastwise vessel,
And not a neighbor by to see her through.
She swore that when the pains got coming fast,
And she was all but gone herself, two hands
Began to do for her, and she could see
The woman they belonged to,—kind of old
And stooped she was, gray haired, with one lid drooping.
That's how she knew her for Bathsheba Berry.—
But, there, I guess I'm getting past my story.

It happened this way, so Aunt Mattie says,
And so her mother's mother used to tell.
Bathsheba lived in an old house that stood
A hundred years and more ago near where
Somes Sound begins. The cellar stones show yet
And there's a lilac bush that blooms in May
For all the crowding spruces try to hide it.
She had a garden, too, where she grew herbs;—
Wormwood, sweet marjoram, and mint, and thyme,
And some with names that only she could say.

She kept a cure for every sort of ailment.
The Indian Root Tea she brewed was famous.
They sent for it from Boston every year.
Oh, yes, she was a real important person,
Widowed some fifteen years, with a grown daughter,
The time I speak of. She'd had lots of chances
To take another husband, but I guess
She found her herbs and doctoring enough
To keep her hands full, and besides she said
She didn't hanker for a snarl of children
To fill her house and trample down her plants.
So that's the way it was, and folks were glad
She saw it in that light. There weren't too many
To help with getting born and dying then.
She must have been well to the north of sixty,
But spry as any woman half her age.
She could keep up for days and night on end
Without her clothes off or a wink of sleep.
She wasn't over-big, but spry and quick
As lightning. Though she'd grown so gray and wrinkled,
Her eyes were bright and dark as crow-berries.
Folks all maintained they'd sooner see her coming
Up to their doors with that old bag of hers
Over one arm, than have the Lord Almighty

Blow in from heaven and take the helm himself.
That was the kind she was, so people sought her
From all points of the compass, in all weathers.
Bathsheba she was used to that, but still
She hadn't lotted to go junketing
Out to the islands that November night
The Stranger came hallooing at her door,
Just such a pitch black one of blowing wet
As I was saying. She was in her bed
When first he knocked.
"Who's there?" she called out sharp,
Peering across her window sill to see.
He wouldn't say his name, though, and his voice
Was like no other she had ever heard.
He kept entreating her to fetch her bag
Without delay and come.
"The need is great,"
He kept on saying. When she questioned him
He made out 'twas some woman brought to childbed
Off on an island,—which, she couldn't hear.
Her daughter said she had no call to go
So far on such a night,—most island wives
Had sense enough to come in to the harbors
Before their time. 'Twas bad enough on land,
But to put out to sea in such a fog

Was more than any had a right to ask.
And still the fellow out there begged and wheedled
And offered any sum she cared to name.
"I'm poor enough, God knows," Bathsheba said,
"But if I go it won't be for the money.
"There isn't cash enough in all creation
"Could pay me, but I wouldn't want it said
"Bathsheba Berry ever shirked her duty,
"Or said 'no' to a woman in such straits."

And so she got her things and followed him
Down the steep path from her place to the shore.
She had a lantern with her, but the Stranger
Hadn't a sign of one. He picked his way
As if the soles of both his feet had eyes.
That was the first thing struck her queer about him.
The next was when she stepped aboard his boat.
It seemed to be some kind of foreign rig,

Like nothing in those parts, where skiffs and dories
Were what they used to navigate near waters.
This one was light and narrow as a knife-blade.
It had a mast without a shred of canvas,
And there were row-locks and no sign of oars.
That made Bathsheba pretty wadgetty,
But they were off by then and moving out
Into the blackness. Nothing left for her
But to hold on and try to get her bearings.
How the boat moved she couldn't rightly say,
But move it did, as if it skimmed the water
And headed straight for somewhere, same as if
A magnet drew it. That was how it seemed.
She couldn't see the fellow humped amidships.
She felt like something hanging all alone
Out in a world of wind and wet and blackness.
And then she heard the tolling of a bell
Above the noise of waves.

"Bass Harbor Bar,"
She whispered, and her heart went back on her.
"God knows where this night's work will end," she thought,
"Hannah was right. I had no call to come."
For they'd gone farther than she guessed, and still
Tiller and compassless the boat kept on.

She was so glad to hear the sound of pebbles
Along their keel, to feel the earth again
She could have lifted up her voice in psalm tunes.
There wasn't so much as a spark of light
Between the spruces crowding to the shore
Rank upon rank. The man went on ahead
After he'd hauled the boat up in a cove.
There seemed to be a flight of crooked steps
Cut in the solid rock, and she went up
As easy as you please behind him there.
But once they reached the top, she said, the spruces
All parted way before them,—'twas the light
She tried to tell herself, because her lantern
Was nearly out, but all the same she knew
Better than that. She saw them move aside
And close again behind her as she passed.
"I never did take stock in ghosts or witches,"
Bathsheba thought, the goose-flesh rising on her,
"But I declare if ever I see home,
"And my own bed again, I won't deny
"The most ungodly and outlandish tales
"That anyone can tell, for nothing's queerer
"Than this night's business,—and it's not done yet!"

They reached the house at last, for house there was,—
A looming shape with one square yellow pane
Of candlelight. It looked real good to her.
All 'Sheba could remember after that
Was a great bed and doing for the woman
Who lay upon it. She was foreign, too,
Same as the Man, but beautiful and pale
As Indian-Pipe before it starts to blacken.
Bathsheba said it frightened her at first
To lay her hands on anything so frail
And lightly made.

It was an easy birth,
As such things go,—a boy child, fashioned nice
As any she'd delivered at the Harbors.
But what Bathsheba never could make out,
Not then or afterwards,—was how he came
At half ebb tide,—when anybody knows,
Who knows the smallest thing about such doings,
That children always come with a flood tide.
The other way is going against nature.
The foreign Fellow kept well out of sight
All through it. If he was the baby's father

He didn't let on by a sign. Bathsheba
Said by that time she didn't care a rap
Whether he was or not, long's her night's work
Was safely through and her face set for home.
Long around daylight, while the Woman slept,
And she was making out to wash the child
And wrap it in some linen she'd fetched with her,
The Man came sidling up, one shoulder hunched
Under his ear; his eyes like chips of mica,
The way they'll glitter on some rock. He held
A little box, no bigger than your thumb-nail.
"Take this," he said, "and do the thing I tell you."
He fixed her with a look that made her feel
Like ice was forming over her back bone.
And then he cautioned her to rub that ointment,
All that the box held, on the child's two eyes.
But she herself on no account might use it
Upon her own. He made that clear enough
To scare most women out of half their wits,
But not Bathsheba Berry, so she took it,
Once he was gone, and did the way he said.
When she was nearly through, she felt an itching
And rubbed her left eye with her forefinger.
She never thought about the ointment on it
Till she was done.

"Oh, well," she thought, "what folks
"Don't know, won't hurt them any. That's the truth.
"I guess this salve of his can't be so precious
"That he should need to grudge me the one smear
"Taken in haste."

She thought no more about it.
The sun came up in red above the trees.
"This will burn off the fog, praise be," she said,
And started packing up her bag to go.
The Woman made a sign to show she thanked her.
The Man he paid her handsomely in silver
Without a murmur. But he took her back
Blindfold until the boat touched shore again
There in the pebble cove below her house.
She felt so thankful when she saw the smoke
Climbing up straight and gray from her own chimney,
The way she hadn't ever thought to see it,
She didn't wait to take leave of the Fellow
Or his queer craft. When she turned back to look
The water spread before her smooth and bare
Of boat or boat's wake as a broad, blue floor.

The more Bathsheba came to think about it

The more it sounded like the sort of yarn
Sailors fetch home with them from foreign parts,
Along with knick knacks carved from strange beasts'
teeth.
Folks would have said she made the story up
Out of whole cloth, except a woman like
Bathsheba Berry wasn't built that way.
Besides her daughter Hannah heard the Man,
And he'd paid for her service in good silver.
Well, lots of men made shift to go off fishing
For days on end among the farther islands,
Though never any sighted smoke or house
Or sign of life except on Gotts' and Swan's.
It got to be a sort of standing joke
Among her neighbors,—"Sheba," they would say,
"How come you haven't been off junketing
"To any island lately? What's become
"Of all your foreign friends with cornstarch airs?"

She took it in good part and half believed
Maybe it hadn't happened, till one Fall
Some five years after, when she went to Bucksport
To pay a visit to her married brother
Who ran the ferry over the Penobscot.
'Twas Cattle Show and County Fair time, folks
Turned up for miles around. Bathsheba Berry
She made the most of sociability.
Lots were old friends she hadn't seen in years,
Not since they'd all been girls in school together,
And some were babies that she'd helped to fetch.
She hardly ever set foot on the Fair Grounds
But she'd run into someone she had known.
The weather was its prettiest, the trees
Just turning round the edge of ponds and streams,
Apples and cider, pumpkins, corn, and jelly
All set out in the booths to be admired.
The money came in fast and all went well
For the first day or two, and then complaints
Began to get around. First so and so
Had lost a firkin of his fresh churned butter;
Then it turned out that someone else was missing
A fine young rooster and a head of cheese,
Not to make mention of those smaller things:—
A pot of jam here, and a fruitcake there.

The strangest part about it all was this,—
That never more than one of anything,
Little or big, would disappear, the rest
Stayed right in place untampered with, although
Whatever went just seemed to melt in air.
Of course it made a lot of talk and trouble
And everyone looked sideways at his neighbor.
The Judges couldn't give the ribbons out
With half the entries spirited away.

Bathsheba's tongue wagged with the rest about it,
And then that last day, long about high noon,
With more than extra bustle in the tents,
With crowds round every booth, and peddlers yelling,
And bleating sheep and young steers bellowing
Off in their pens,—Bathsheba saw a face
She hadn't ever thought to meet again.
It was the foreign Man and no mistake.
She knew him by his eyes and that hunched shoulder,
And by two ear-rings made of thin gold wire.
She saw him go up to a booth as bold
As brass, and help himself to a ripe pear.
Then next he slipped away and drained a pan

Of rich new milk, a farmer's wife was skimming.
She watched it disappear, without a protest,
Her spoon still in her hand, her round eyes rolling.
Old 'Tilda Fernald never raised a finger
Though he made off with her best pumpkin pie,
And Nathan Sawyer's fancy headed cane.
Bathsheba wasn't one for standing by
And watching sights like that without a word,
So when he came up close to where she was,
Quick as a wink she grabbed him by the sleeve.
"Good day," she said, real soft and pleasant spoken
Because she knew she mustn't get him riled
Right at the start, till she could call the rest,
"I hope I see you well? And your good wife?
"Is your son grown to be a hearty boy?
"What brings you here? And robbing honest folks?"

He gave her a long look. She said it chilled her
From head to foot although the strong noon sun
Was beating down upon them.
"So," he said,
And smiled a secret smile he had, more sly,
Than pleasant. "So, Bathsheba Berry,
"You're here. And do you see me plain as day?"

"Why, yes," she answered, "you've not changed a
mite."
"And which eye do you see me with, Bathsheba?"
His voice went through her like a stab of lightning,
She felt her body shrinking there before him,
But still she answered up, all unsuspecting,
"This one," she said, and pointed to the left.
"You see too much. I warned you not to touch it."
He told her sternly. Then he blew upon it.
She said his breath was like both ice and fire
In one, before a blackness settled down
And he was gone. Her fingers plucked at nothing.
Next thing Bathsheba Berry knew, the Fair
Was swarming round her like a hive of bees,
Trying to get the story straight, and trying
First one sure remedy and then another
For bringing sight, and prying eyelids open.
But none were any use; hers stayed sealed fast
As some drawn shutter on a boarded house.
She carried it like that clear to the grave,
Although her neighbors always did maintain
She made her right one do for double duty,
And missed less things than most.

So there it is,

And anyone that wants can draw conclusions
Out of the facts. Bathsheba would have been
The last to try and fathom it herself,
And as for me, I always say a story
Belongs to anyone who has a mind
To take it as it comes,—whether or no.

*This book has been designed, in the early 19th century style, by Priscilla Crane. The type used is Scotch and Granjon; the composition, printing and binding have been done in the U. S. A. by the J. J. Little and Ives Company.*

## About Rachel Field

Rachel Field was born and raised in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. She belongs to New England. Her summers have always been spent on a small island off the Maine coast. When it was time for her to go to college she selected Radcliffe. Even when she later came to New York and began writing it was the homely beauty of the New England of yesterday, and the lilacs and white spires against the New England of today, that thrilled her. In her earlier books, "The Pointed People," "Taxis and Toadstools" and others, she demonstrated an ability to capture this beauty, but it was the story of the early American wooden doll, "Hitty, Her First Hundred Years," published last fall, that brought into full play her affinity with New England's past and her feeling for its present. Here, in another medium, she bares for the reader the very heart of this past in legends that capture not only the physical but the spiritual property of this Down East country.

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## *A NEW ENGLAND WINDOW*

Long long ago through this same pane of glass
Eyes peered for Indians; saw trappers pass;
Watched trees fall back and houses multiply
Round that white steeple, saw the coach roll by,
And ships with lovely names skirt ledge and bar:—
"Rainbow," "Sea-Garland," Martha," "Morning Star,"
Gold on their bows and canvas billowing
Whiter than any orchard in the spring.
Out of this window even then, as now,
Green turned to scarlet on the maple bough,
And lives to legend,—brittle grown and dry
As leaves we snatch at when the wind blows by.